

Meeting Notes
(Draft)
Wetlands Task Force
Outreach and Education Work Group

Meeting Date: March 30, 2000

Developed by: Bryan Wolfenden

Members present included Derry Riding (RI Statewide Planning), Michael DeLuca (RI APA, Cranston City Planner), Dexter Miller (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Carol Murphy (RIDEM) and Bryan Wolfenden (The Louis Berger Group). Lorraine Joubert of URI, Coop Ext., Sarah Porter (RIAWS), and Jennifer Perkins of (RILCAT) were unable to attend due to schedule conflicts, however the previous meeting notes and agenda were sent to them and their input was solicited. Ms. Kendra Beaver of Save The Bay and Mr. Joe Frisella of Frisella Engineering have indicated that they will not be able to participate in this workgroup because of their involvement in other groups within the Wetlands Task Force. However, they have asked to continue to be sent information on our progress.

Carol Murphy of RIDEM introduced herself to the other members. Mr. Wolfenden asked if the group had any comments or questions on the meeting notes. Ms. Riding noted that the revisions and clarification she had sought for the RIDEM role in regulatory issue education had been made, and that she felt comfortable with that.

The group discussed the need to have someone from the building community involved, especially someone with a development background who is actually investing in developments. Mr. Frisella had shared some important issues from the perspective of the project engineer working on development and all agreed that they would like to see that expanded upon. Ms. Riding suggested that perhaps someone from the RI Builders Assn., (RIBA) could also participate in our workgroup. Ms. Riding volunteered to contact Mr. Roger Warren from RIBA to inquire on the potential of having developer representation.

Ms. Murphy briefed the group on some of the activities already being implemented at RIDEM in relation to outreach and education. She has been working with other wetlands staff members on several fact sheets and a publication with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about wetland regulations from a layperson perspective. Some of the fact sheets include exemptions for homeowners and municipalities. Drafts of the documents were shown to group members for comment. All agreed that the fact sheets and other publications were a good direction to go in and would certainly be part of an overall education and outreach strategy.

Carol also relayed that the RIDEM was planning on organizing several workshops on an annual basis, with a tentative date in May 2000 for the first one. Carol said that the May workshop would most likely be an open house type and held at night.

Group members shared that RIDEM should consider having additional diverse expertise and review for some of the efforts which are being initiated.

Discussion revolved around some of the issues previously identified and expansion of items within the overall issue listing. The group makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. RIDEM should create an advisory task force or committee to provide input and technical guidance for the development of educational media. This group should include people with a background in education, public relations and computer communications, as well as end-users. The group sees the development of education and outreach materials as a high priority
2. An outreach and education strategic plan should be developed and incorporated as an element within the RIDEM Strategic and Operations plan. This plan should determine the need for sufficient resources for implementation to achieve desired goals and objectives. Wherever possible, collaboratives and partnerships should be formed to be most effective and build upon other groups and organizations existing successful programs and initiatives.
3. The group believes strongly and unanimously that the RIDEM should review the wetlands mapping for the state and determine the needs for accuracy and commit to the development and distribution of said maps to all municipalities and to make these maps accessible to the public through the internet.
4. Upon the successful completion of an education and outreach plan and curriculum, the RIDEM should consider using individuals from a listing of volunteers who have experience working with the public to actually conduct some of the training. Also possible to use some professional trainers and facilitators. These individuals should receive some compensation.
5. As part of the education plan, examples of good and bad permit applications should be provided, perhaps as an attachment to the application form. Wetland information resources should be listed on the back of application forms for easy access to individuals applying for a permit. This could include locations of maps, references and organizations that can help, etc.
6. In order to facilitate communication between RIDEM and communities, there should be a joint application conference held which includes both RIDEM and community representation. Also, the development of a database of wetland permit applications and their status, which can be accessed by specific community employees, should be considered a priority. Provisions for limiting access to the information could be made by limiting to password holders only.

7. The RIDEM should take the lead in coordinating regulatory subject outreach and education and enlist other organizations for implementing a strategic plan. The Rhode Island Conservation Districts were identified as providing a regional outreach network and source of technical expertise and credibility. District personnel and board member's frequently have very good relations with local decision-makers throughout the state and their involvement can strengthen RIDEM's efforts.
8. The group believes that Recommendation #4, listed on the next page, should be referred to the group studying staff problem solving and related issues, lead by Ron Gagnon of RIDEM.

Group members agreed that for the next meeting on April 27, 2000 at the USDA Conference Room, that they will refine and organize the recommendations for the identified issues.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:00am.

Issues and Recommendations from first meeting (March 9, 2000).

Issues:

1. Outreach to other bodies (municipal) – This issue was important to the whole group, and really involves broadening the definition of who RIDEM's customers are. Which includes the following:
 2. Federal Agencies
 3. Include development community
 4. Local Boards
5. Wetlands mapping availability – For years people have heard that accurate wetland maps would be based in every town hall and made available to the public. This has not happened, and while we are aware that plans are being made to revise the mapping, we still believe this needs to be a resource, which should be readily available. The group sees this as a priority.
6. Make a commitment to staff education – The RIDEM should ensure that staff are supported in their ability to provide top notch service. This means they should receive in-house and outside training in technical and customer service subjects.
7. Allow staff to provide training/education to public on Saturdays and be paid for it. Several members presented this as a concern. Sometimes RIDEM staff have participated in training the public on Saturdays and in the evenings, but have had to do it on their own time.
8. RIDEM to take the lead *on regulatory subjects* and present an example to towns etc.

Recommendations:

1. Development collaborative strategies for implementation – No need to reinvent the wheel! There are many good examples in nearby states, which present models of collaboration. This approach can be most cost-effective and inclusive.
2. Explore alternative methods for implementation as per examples from CT. and Mass. for funding and implementation of training and education.
3. Develop a strategic outreach and education plan which includes the environmental community and developers perspective, and implement it. Ensure that there are adequate resources (staff and financial) committed to sustain these efforts.
4. Process: *application* consistency is important – The importance of having staff be consistent in their determinations and requirements *during the permit application review stage* has been identified by many as an area of concern. People who have had quite a bit of first hand experience with this process have indicated that the knowledge of the DEM staff person in reviewing the proposal and site makes a big difference. *Again this supports the need for some type of formal technical training.* The big picture of the proposed project needs to be understood, as well as the minute details of the site plans.
5. Ensure that local input and participation at the pre-application RIDEM meeting and vice versa – from a planner's perspective and a developer's, this would be most helpful.
6. Staff Training Support will increase predictability and consistency this will save time for all, and ensure a quality review process.
7. Provide a listing on the internet and maps which present jurisdictional limits i.e. bufferzones etc.
8. Create a site or parcel database on GIS which depicts areas of known wetlands which have come before the DEM .
9. Governor and legislature need to be more responsive re: DEMs wetlands funding needs.
10. Check into the availability of funding from the Army Corp of Engineers for staff activities related to implementing the new ACE permit regulations.

The group agreed to focus on 2 or 3 items for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30pm. The next meeting is planned for 3/30/00 at 8:30am at the USDA Conference Room, 60 Quaker Lane, Warwick. For directions please call 828-1300. An agenda will be emailed or snail-mailed. Please call Bryan Wolfenden at 401.521.5980 if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you.